FRANK ZAPPA'S
CHEAPER THAN CHEAP
CONTRAST

NAPOLEON
MURPHY BROCK

TENOR SAX, FLUTE, VOCALS

FRANK
ZAPPA

GUITAR, VOCALS

GEORGE
DUKE

KEYBOARDS, VOCALS

CHESTER
THOMPSON

DRUMS

TOM
FOWLER

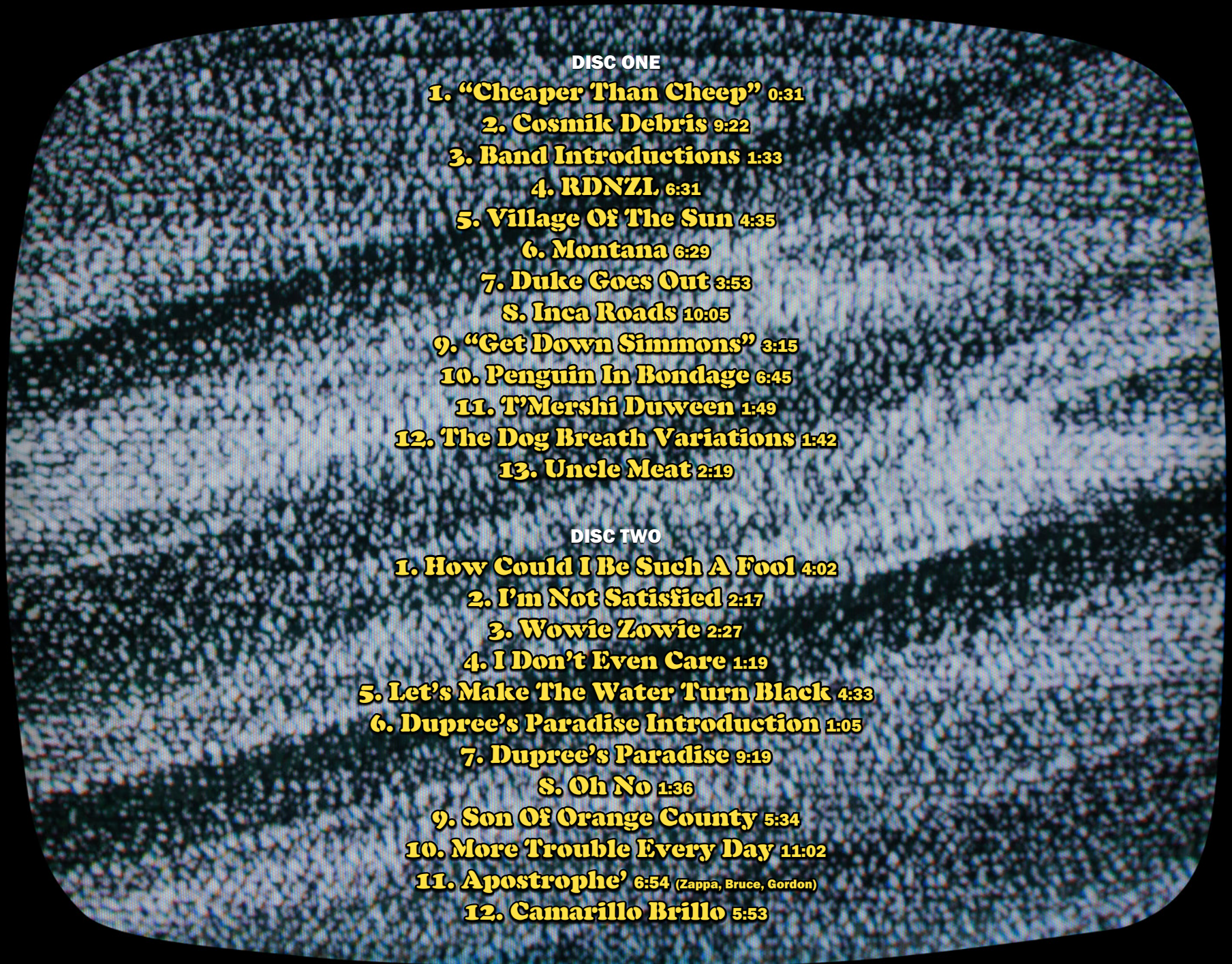
BASS

RUTH
UNDERWOOD

PERCUSSION

JEFF
SIMMONS

GUITAR, VOCALS



DISC ONE

1. "Cheaper Than Cheep" 0:31
2. Cosmik Debris 9:22
3. Band Introductions 1:33
4. RDNZL 6:31
5. Village Of The Sun 4:35
6. Montana 6:29
7. Duke Goes Out 3:53
8. Inca Roads 10:05
9. "Get Down Simmons" 3:15
10. Penguin In Bondage 6:45
11. T'Mershi Duween 1:49
12. The Dog Breath Variations 1:42
13. Uncle Meat 2:19

DISC TWO

1. How Could I Be Such A Fool 4:02
2. I'm Not Satisfied 2:17
3. Wowie Zowie 2:27
4. I Don't Even Care 1:19
5. Let's Make The Water Turn Black 4:33
6. Dupree's Paradise Introduction 1:05
7. Dupree's Paradise 9:19
8. Oh No 1:36
9. Son Of Orange County 5:34
10. More Trouble Every Day 11:02
11. Apostrophe' 6:54 (Zappa, Bruce, Gordon)
12. Camarillo Brillo 5:53

ZAPPA RECORDS

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UMe
ZR20047

CHEAPER THAN CHEEP

Produced by Frank Zappa, Ahmet Zappa, Joe Travers

Produced for UMe by Jeff Fura, Holland Greco

Recorded at The Mothers Of Invention rehearsal hall, 21 June, 1974
Recording Engineer: Kerry McNabb
Recording Facility: Wally Heider Remote Truck
Source: 2" 16-Track Analog Masters
Digital Transfers: Joe Travers, Rodney Pearson UMRK 2015
Mix and Mastering by Erich Gobel and Karma Auger, Studio1LA

Art Direction & Package Design: Michael Mesker
Liner Notes: Ruth Komanoff Underwood, Joe Travers
Photography: Sam Emerson
Production Manager: Alex Sale
Product Manager: Ashley Slater
UMe PR: Tim Plumley

All Musical Selections Composed & Arranged
by Frank Zappa except as indicated.
Published by Munchkin Music (ASCAP)

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Brittany Usher, Gianeli Usher, Dick Darley, Mort Libov,
Jerry Souci, Paul Hof, Coy Featherstone, Everyone at UMe,
and the cheapest, greatest studio audience in all of TV history.

When the Roxy performances were filmed in December 1973, it was apparent that a budget was being prioritized for either a movie project or something television oriented. Frank makes references to both during the shows. As history would have it, there were technical difficulties during the Roxy shooting that prevented Frank from being able to utilize the footage. Schedule wise, the holidays came and went, Jeff Simmons rejoined the band and the 1974 Mothers Of Invention brought in the new year by a month of rehearsals, then going on the road. Over a course of time, personnel expanded for a 10 Year Anniversary Tour in March and later downsized with members coming and going. By June, we had the core band of Jeff, George, Napoleon, Tom, and Chester, with Ruth Underwood rejoining the fold after a brief hiatus. An opportunity was generated to record the group in performance onto videotape, specifically with the prospect of a television special in mind. The inception to completion took all of two and a half days total, according to a small write-up on the project in Billboard Magazine.

Back in ’74, mainstream late night television had been achieving large success with music oriented programs. Shows like The Midnight Special, ABC’s In Concert, and Don Kirshner’s Rock Concert were outlets for artists to be seen as well as heard. The Mothers never performed on any of these shows. Maybe there were no offers? Not surprisingly, FZ would rather have done his own production, on his own terms, to be shopped to the networks.

During the week of June 21st, a video production company, along with the Wally Heider Remote Truck set up shop at The Mothers rehearsal hall on Sunset Boulevard. Inside the hall, the stage was implemented with the current touring equipment and setup, including backdrop and lighting. The shoot would be multi-camera direct to 2” Quad Videotape, the industry standard at the time. Also, the recording truck was outfitted with two 16-track tape machines with Kerry McNabb in the engineer’s seat. A small audience was invited inside for some of the taping.

Yet again, as if cursed, the date would turn out to be another technical failure. Just like the Roxy project before it, there was no proper connection between the audio and video world to keep everything in sync. It was a large oversight that again cost the project, as technology to marry the two entities would not exist for many years to come. Also, the performance was most likely not up to snuff for Zappa. The band had not been in

rehearsals for long prior to the shoot date. With Ralph Humphrey recently leaving the group, Chester Thompson no doubt was in the process of combining the two drummer arrangements of the previous tour into one, his own. Bruce Fowler, the amazing trombonist, had also departed. Ruth was re-familiarizing herself with material after not playing it for months. There were other issues with the shoot. Lighting was primarily dark and incredibly hot, generating a ton of heat on the stage. This made the long day very uncomfortable for the musicians, specifically Chester and George who seemed to be the closest to the raging gels behind them. At one point, George told Frank the keyboards were too hot to play. Undaunted, the band played on, but in the end, the entire production was shelved and stored in the Vault.

The footage reveals the seeds of a possible special, complete with an opening segment with FZ inside the production trucks as well as a visit to the art studio across the way. This segment contains the earliest footage of Bruce Bickford, who had only just recently signed on with Intercontinental Absurdities. Bickford's relationship with FZ lasted years, from climbing over the house gate in 1972 with some film reels under his arm, to his animation being featured heavily in a number of Zappa video and movie projects (most notably "A Token Of His Extreme" (1976) and "Baby Snakes - The Movie" (1979). Also present is in-house artist Cal Schenkel, complete with pet parrot and goat in tow.

During the shoot, FZ did not have a specific set list prepared. The band went through the bulk of the current repertoire, prioritizing multiple takes for such songs as Inca Roads, The Dog Breath Variations/Uncle Meat and RDNZL. When the band made a mistake, FZ would stop and replay the problematic sections to be edited correctly later on. Some songs, like "Penguin In Bondage", were only played in sections. Others, such as "Is There Anything Good Inside Of You?/Andy," and "Echidna's Arf (of You)," didn't finish a complete take. The shoot was long and hot, but in the end, FZ and band achieved many hours of live performance footage captured for the ages. Zappa did try to work on a video edit of Inca Roads not too long after the shoot, but no doubt quickly realized the challenges of the footage, mostly due to coverage, audio sync issues and overall performance execution. It seems FZ was hopeful, as he mentioned the "impending TV special" in a promotional package created by Cal and himself to advertise "Ten Years On The Road With Frank Zappa and The Mothers Of Invention." I'm assuming this promo package was created before the KCET studios shoot in August 1974. KCET finally did give Frank the successful shoot he'd need to create

the sought-after television special. Once achieved, the June 21st shoot was put aside and never revisited by FZ during his lifetime.

During my years as Vaultmeister, I of course came across the audio and video masters in the vault, all with "June 21st, 1974" written on the spines. I had no idea what they were or what they were for. They remained a mystery for years. The digital transfers of the elements happened over a long period of time, mostly due to budget and priority. Some were done for identification purposes while Gail Zappa was alive during the 2000's. Imagine how exciting it was for us to finally discover what this stuff actually looked like for the first time. It was a gold mine waiting to be unearthed. Most of the masters were transferred during the "Save The Vault" Kickstarter campaign by Alex Winter circa 2017 or so. The audio tapes contained two tracks for sync purposes, which allowed us to resolve the digital hi-res transfers. This was an integral step which helped very much when eventually joining audio to picture. Special thanks go to David Crosthwait at DC Video in Burbank CA for the tender loving care and Rodney Pearson for his help with the resolved transfers during 2015.

Now, suddenly, for its 50th anniversary, we have ***Cheaper Than Cheep***. The roughly two hour edit was assembled by basically adhering to FZ's lead, incorporating all of the planned segments, while sequencing the live material based on performance order and typical 1974 live set lists. A team was assembled to bring this footage to life, with Ahmet Zappa taking on the directorial role and myself as Producer. Erich Gobel and Karma Auger were brought in to mix the audio for the program, including a state of the art Dolby Atmos soundtrack. John Albarian, who worked on the *Roxy Movie*, did wonderful editing of the performance footage and a stellar job of matching picture to audio. Jeremy Rhodes was brought in to do additional editing and sweetening for the final program. Universal A+R team members Holland Greco and Jeff Fura have also been a huge factor in making ***Cheaper Than Cheep*** a reality.

We hope you all enjoy this historical trip back in time, during a very popular and successful era in Frank Zappa's career. This band has gone on to be a fan favorite, and little did he know that within months, he would have his first hit single and top ten album.

Joe Travers
Vaultmeister

PROLOGUE

My life was imploding.

Three years earlier, Frank Zappa had famously written “Touring Can Make You Crazy.” He had even crafted a feature film around that concept, which fascinated and amused me. But when my own life turned upside down, it wasn’t funny at all, not to me. Touring had become my happy, sane place, and home my sad, chaotic one. This was a big problem.

Frank saw it coming before I did; he was all too familiar with similar circumstances. When I asked for time away from touring, he understood and said yes, though he wasn’t happy about it. Personnel changes were never convenient or seamless, and this one could be especially challenging. We had just returned on March 24th from our first ‘74 tour. The next one, a Mothers 10th Anniversary celebration, was scheduled to begin April 19th, less than a month away. I had confidence in Frank’s uncanny ability to turn adversity to advantage; I’d seen him spring into action and transform seemingly impossible setbacks into spectacular successes. We both knew he’d find a way to do it again.

It occurred to me that I might not want to come back. Maybe he wouldn’t ask.

With the 10th Anniversary Tour completed, the band returned on May 13th, although I wasn’t aware of it. I’d been away from all things Zappa for almost two months and had cut myself off from anything to do with that part of my life. I hadn’t touched my instruments or even thought about the music. Time felt suspended in slow motion, and little had changed at home. I began to realize I needed more time to try and fix this.

The following day, Marty Perellis, the Zappa road manager, called me at Frank's request. Would I consider coming back to resume touring? I told Marty I couldn't, not this soon, but we agreed that I should at least meet with Frank to tell him myself.

The next day, May 15th, Marty picked me up, and we made our way up Laurel Canyon Bl toward Mulholland Dr, talking nonstop. When we missed the left turn to the Zappa house and sailed over Mulholland and down the hill toward Hollywood, I was surprised. Then he told me we'd be meeting Frank at a different location.

But when we pulled up at a hospital, my heartbeat quickened. What the hell was going on? Shades of London, 12/10/71 and Frank in a wheelchair for most of '72 flooded my mind. Now what? Marty was subdued as he parked the car. He steered me toward a private waiting room, and we entered. There was Frank, busily working, writing, engrossed, and looking perfectly intact. So why were we there? Ah, of course! While on tour with the band in '73, I happened to be standing near Frank when Gail called to tell him she was pregnant again. Now she was in labor, but this time, so I learned, things were not going as expected and were potentially serious.

I wouldn't have known it from Frank's demeanor. When he looked up and saw us, he became animated and hugged me. After a few minutes, he asked, and I told him I wouldn't be coming back very soon. Immediately, he brushed my words aside and joked, cajoled, teased, and lectured me. When I was ready to leave, he insisted we stay longer. Then things changed. A medical person knocked on the door to update Frank about Gail's condition. Fifteen minutes later, someone else arrived with more news. Soon after, there was yet another update. Things escalated quickly, and after a few moments, two people came and said, "Mr. Zappa, you need to come now."

Marty and I thought it best to leave, but I was torn. As we walked toward the door, Frank, still sitting in his chair, turned and looked back at me. When the door began to close, the last click felt like a thud in my heart. I heard myself blurt out from the hallway, "Okay! I'll do it!"

In the silence of the drive home, I felt the weight of Gail's precarious situation. I loved her and had become increasingly worried with every knock at that waiting-room door. As my thoughts turned to my own life, I pondered how the hell I could keep my word to Frank and survive all the fallout from my loved ones — and from within myself.

What does any of this have to do with Cheaper Than Cheep? From my perspective, quite a lot. As I watched the film for the first time, a rush of pleasure flowed through me when I saw "Directed by Ahmet Zappa" on the screen. Ahmet and Vaultmeister Joe were instrumental in getting Cheaper Than Cheep out from its obscure place in the Vault, where it had been in limbo for fifty years, waiting for the right technology to make it work. They carefully shepherded it through all the proper channels and finally into our hands for us to enjoy. No one could have known on the day it was filmed, 6/21/74, that a little over a month before, when Ahmet was born, he would grow to contribute profoundly to Frank Zappa's continuing legacy—and so creatively and lovingly to this special project.

Ahmet's birth, and the serious complications he, Gail and Frank had to endure at the hospital that day, breathed new life into my experience with Frank's music and the band for the remainder of the year. The privilege of being part of some of the ensembles Frank loved so much, particularly his "commando unit" in the second half of '74, is something I'm deeply proud of, and for which, despite all the difficulties along the way, I have no regrets.

CHEAPER THAN CHEEP

We Zappa fanatics have been lavishly spoiled by the steady flow of releases from the Vault. Each one has been discerningly cultivated, inspiringly packaged, comprehensive in scope, and often accompanied by elaborate books with commentary and photos. They're flat-out gorgeous to behold! We revel in these masterpieces that are themselves works of art. What we don't often experience are FZ's behind-the-scenes efforts, the process, or unplanned elements that affect the finished result.

You're in for a treat with this one that does reveal more. It's as much a feast for the eyes as it is for the ears. Whatever period of FZ's massive output you prefer, whatever collection of musicians you enjoy, whatever specific music you might crave, and whatever you've come to know and feel about him, I believe you will see something that lets you experience Frank in a new way.

You'll see familiar faces, but from rarely-viewed perspectives. You'll hear renditions of the music that may differ from what you expect. You'll join us in the rehearsal hall—our home away from home—and follow Frank into an attached art space I never knew existed at that time. You'll watch a band that wasn't quite ready for its closeup, though FZ hoped it was. And you'll get a taste of his well-known insults that usually were directed at his audiences, but here are aimed at his musicians. Whether intended or not, those barbs hit their mark that day and stung.

Most importantly, you'll see a man wearing every possible hat, as he attempts to control all aspects of this filmed event from uncontrollable variable conditions and locations. He does this while presiding over and participating in the musical performance. That, in and of itself, isn't new for FZ, but what **is** new is that we see it unfold in real time.

We had a long rehearsal and a detailed soundcheck that morning. With the lights set, and the photographers and audience crammed into our modest space, the heat in the room became extremely problematic. In addition, according to Joe Travers, Frank insisted on doing several takes of specific pieces, which added to our general exhaustion. And we had other issues to overcome.

This was a band in transition. Ralph Humphrey had decided to leave after the 10th Anniversary Tour, and I missed him in the percussion section. What I hadn't known during my two-month hiatus, were the other changes afoot: Don Preston, Bruce Fowler, and Walt Fowler were now also gone. The remaining six musicians had to adapt, not only to the loss of those key players, but to my renewed presence and sounds. It required significant musical adjustments within new orchestrations of pieces to suit our particular instrumentation. With FZ, we found ways to add textural fullness and compositional interest, while maintaining the character he wanted. These changes began to feel familiar, but we needed them to become a part of us, and soon.

I noticed a more subtle difference upon my return. Not only had I missed the 10th Anniversary Tour, but I'd actually missed a good deal more: the 24/7 camaraderie of touring, the day-to-day drudgery, the intense intimacy of our road family, the deep personal and musical trust, the outrageous humor, and the "folklore" that fueled Frank's imagination and fed the lyrics

(which lifted our spirits and nourished our bond). I'd forfeited those shared experiences, and the lack I felt extended to our fine-tuned, intuitive musical rapport. Slightly frayed, it too would require some time to mend and strengthen.

It's taken me many viewings of *Cheaper Than Cheep* to recall this. I had forgotten almost everything from that day. It seemed to dissolve and get absorbed into our relentless schedule. If Frank was disappointed with the shoot, he didn't dwell on it. He wasn't in the habit of looking back, only charging ahead. I never heard him mention the event again. A week later, we left for the June 28th tour.

During these past weeks, I've turned to Joe for help reconnecting with that time. His researching skills, and decades-long knowledge and "feel" of FZ's history, helped me restore some of the random pieces and put them back together. Our conversations brought me greater clarity about my experience and FZ's goal with this film. When I first viewed it, I was disappointed with my musical shortcomings that day. I wished I'd played with more nuance and finesse—and fewer wrong notes. But now that I'm able to look beyond that, I feel only joy and gratitude that we have this film. I consider it a treasure, an unearthed gem that shines another light on FZ. If some parts are a bit rough around the edges, and not Zappa perfect, I accept and even appreciate them. In fact, I believe it's the flaws that help make the film so illuminating, meaningful, and important.

At this time in my life, I embrace a sense that through Cheaper Than Cheep, after all these years, FZ has been returned to us in a more authentic, human way. I hope you too will find something in this rare film release to enjoy and value—and love.

A FEW BITS & PIECES...

RDNZL

Any version of RDNZL was fun to play! The marimba solo FZ composed for me sprang from his desire to hear me improvise. I wanted to improve my skills, but not during our nightly recorded shows in front of large audiences. My bandmates were all seasoned improvisers who welcomed every chance to solo when FZ pointed. But I worried that my fledgling attempts would ruin the piece. Ultimately, he was determined to hear a marimba solo, improvised or not. In the film, FZ described

it as “real hard to play,” and at this flying speed, that was certainly true.

When we performed RDNZL, FZ would count off “One One One One,” and we would reset our inner clocks to his tempo. Each “One” represented one measure, so during the count off, we’d have four bars “for free,” after which we were off and running. When he remarked that George might play it on the next tour, it probably happened. FZ constantly changed things up. That was one of the thrills—and challenges—of performing with him.

I found the process fascinating. The moment he gave me the manuscript of the solo, hastily written in pencil, not in FZ’s customary black ink, I loved it. I “heard” it as a slow, legato piece of music. It’s beautiful when rendered expressively and had the sentimental quality of a ballroom-danced waltz. We played it that way at first, but not for long, as lovely as it was. FZ may have felt that it wouldn’t hold up in a rock concert, or that the momentum of the fast intro was sacrificed too early. We started playing it faster, but that didn’t please him either at the time. Then FZ wanted George to try it in unison with me, but George wasn’t enthusiastic about it. Sometimes we omitted the marimba solo altogether, but FZ always came back to it. Finally, he found an ingenious way to present it that felt good and kept listeners engaged.

If you’re familiar with the phrase “trading fours” (usually in jazz, but works in any setting), you’ll understand my saying that FZ had George and me “trading eights” in the solo. Here’s where FZ’s brilliance sealed the deal: I played the composed notes for the first eight measures, and then George took the next eight bars and embellished them, keeping the written melody somewhat recognizable—not going completely “out,” as he would say. Then, the marimba entered for the next eight bars, and George did his thing with his next eight. We continued doing this for the duration of the solo. It worked! While slower than the fast intro, our contrasting styles and sounds held the audience’s interest. As usual, I was happy to play the written notes, and George was happy to stretch out a bit and be free of the “little notes” staring back at him from the page. FZ seemed happy too—for a while.

Later in RDNZL, George’s own solo, backed by the extraordinary rhythm section, is off the charts great! If you’re curious about what meter they’re playing in, here it is, courtesy of Joe Travers: “It’s in 17/16. Divided into 2/4” (that’s eight sixteenth notes) “and 9/16” (another nine sixteenth notes—equaling 17 sixteenth notes total per bar or measure), “with your cheapo gong on the downbeat of the last 3 16th notes of the figure.”

That’s a lot of math, but they made it swing!!!

INCA ROADS

This wonderful piece had a long journey in a short time: from the simple lead sheet FZ handed the early ‘73 band; to the vocals, lyrics, and instrumental reworkings he added later that year; to this filmed rendition in Cheaper Than Cheep; and soon after, to KCET’s A Token of His Extreme on 8/27/74. Each is unique and stands alone.

I found this version particularly satisfying. FZ had extracted a musical phrase from his composed theme. After fulfilling its written purpose, it repeated through much of the song. I was so taken with the ostinato’s effect, that I wondered why FZ removed it from later performances. How foolish of me; change was his M.O.

As the music became more rhythmically complex, Chester saved me from free fall when I rushed the ostinato figure. He held me in check during FZ’s solo, by emphasizing the two notes at the end of each repeated phrase. Napi’s flute was of further aid within this sonic density. His unison timbre was clearly audible and guided me, like a light through turbulent waters. When FZ explored more harmonic regions and played on against the continuing ostinato, the colliding dissonance thrilled me!

FZ’S HAND SIGNALS

FZ’s creativity was limitless. This was obvious to me in 1967, when I attended my first MOI show at NYC’s Garrick Theatre. Among other revelations, I discovered that a Mothers performance could be entirely unplanned, and might include little of what most listeners then regarded as music.

He utilized any means to express himself. The hand signals were a simple, but effective way FZ could elicit particular sounds from his band. With the lowest grunts and growls, to the highest shrieks and whoops, they ran the gamut from comedic and outrageous, to provocative and disruptive. On a whim, FZ could introduce the most sublime music, or prompt interminably repetitive drum and bass patterns in 5 or 7. It wasn’t uncommon to see perplexed, frustrated, or even angry listeners exit the theatre early, while intrigued or captivated ones clamored for more.

Cheaper Than Cheep was filmed seven years after FZ’s pivotal six-month Garrick residency. His hand-signal palette had expanded, which demanded more detailed and intricate musical responses. He could enhance a moment, layer over a solo, frame the show’s structure, or reshape it on the spot, exactly as he desired. Beyond this ‘74 band’s era, FZ continued to amass even more ambitious hand signals for his ensembles.

If you watch FZ carefully in CTC, you’ll notice his hand signals and their effects. Some originated during his Garrick residency, and were later refined.

For a sample of FZ’s hand signals in CTC, you can enjoy an array from where Inca Roads ends to where Penguin In Bondage begins.

APOSTROPHE’

This performance of Apostrophe’ has it all. Even days after viewing it, I still experience it in my mind. I hear it, I feel the collective intensity of its full-throttle delivery, I recall the surprises that first made my heart stop and then laugh, and I see the faces of my dear band mates, as I go about my life. The fifty years since it was filmed melt away.

What a pleasure it is to see Tom featured, especially in **this** bass solo! Having a closer view of him on the screen than I ever had during our live shows is a thrill. There is so much here to love about his playing: his sweet, round tone; his phrasing’s lyrical quality; his inventive melodic lines; and his solid rhythmic presence. Tom’s knowledge and facility with musical style, and his ability to instantly switch from blending in, to leading the charge made him indispensable. Tom was the youngest musician in FZ’s ‘73-‘74 bands, but you wouldn’t have known it from his professional demeanor. He was stable, smart, balanced, interesting, and a joy to be with on and off the stage. Tom’s filmed performance makes this Apostrophe’ my absolute favorite.

Following Tom's solo, FZ keeps the energy going. There's a stunning moment that caught me off guard the first time I watched: FZ plays a chord and repeats it over and over, pushing it further out of the expected rhythmic frame. The time begins to stretch, bend, falter, and collapse. His strumming becomes insistent and erratic. He's moved from his usual spot toward the other players, in a very uncharacteristic manner that's both fluidly graceful and oddly grotesque. This happens quickly, before I can process it, but I can't take my eyes off FZ, who seems to have entered another realm. It's unexpected and breathtaking. At some point, with a quick flourish of FZ's hand for George, and an almost simultaneous arm movement for Chester, he's summoned them both. Chester plays a perfectly executed drum fill that, curiously, seems constructed in reverse starting with the exciting, fast, precisely-placed notes, and becoming rudimentary individual strikes – it heralds the band's return to the head of the tune.

With more themes chugging along, and everyone fully in play, FZ is on fire! He rides high atop the ostinato machine he's created, and proceeds to supply every sound I hadn't known I craved, until he played them. With the dense sonic textures, the colorful lights, the dancing visual images, and George standing up at his keyboards, the stage is set for another surprise. Suddenly legs are in the air! Even Chester is smiling. FZ forges ahead "in the zone," with a wild vigor that, for me, evokes some of his Garrick Theatre guitar solos. How I wish this could have lasted longer. Then, FZ lowers the volume and pauses. Using his hand signals, he slowly draws out two low-pitched "drags" interspersed with plaintive high-pitched cries, and leads the band into Camarillo Brillo. It's a festive, celebratory finale to this wonderful film.

Tom Fowler
6/10/51 – 7/2/24
Tom, we will miss you forever.

— Ruth Komanoff Underwood

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